TESL Ontario

ISSN 0227-2938

Contact

Newsletter of the Association of Teachers of English as a Second Language of Ontario
Vol. 31, No.2, Summer 2005

From the Editor

I look forward to bringing you this new format of Contact – it will be easier for you to download and print the articles you are most interested in. We start with articles of interest for those teaching in the **secondary panel**. In Considerations for the Revisions of the ESL/ELD Curriculum (9-12), Ivan Kocmarek makes several suggestions for the betterment of these programs. Then, in One Place, Many Languages, Claudia Ancuta shows us an example of one Toronto School, which seems to already be practicing some of these suggestions.

Next, are articles of interest to those teaching **foreign-trained professionals**, specifically foreign-trained teachers and pharmacists. Li Zhang and Liying Cheng explores the challenges immigrant teacher in a program at Queen's face through their writing and Michael Galle reviews the Language Prior Learning Assessment in a U. of T. program for foreign-trained pharmacists.

Then we have some practical classroom strategies for your learners. Karen Bond suggests how we can get our shy learners to speak and Judy Pollard Smith shares three successful strategies for teaching her **adult learners**.

Finally, read how TESL Ontario recently recognized Dr. David Mendelsohn with a lifetime TESL Canada membership for his contribution to our profession.
Have a safe summer. Brigid Kelso, Editor, Contact

Table of Contents

Freedom to Speak: A Virtual Way for Shy Students to Practice Speaking English 2

Ideas for Teaching Adult Learners 4

Considerations for the Revisions of the ESL/ELD Curriculum Document Grades 9-12 6

Dr. David Mendelsohn awarded TESL Canada Honourary Life Membership 10

Understanding the English Language Challenges Immigrant Teachers Face through Their Academic Writing 11

Review of the Linguistic Prior Learning Assessment for International Pharmacy Graduate Students at the U of T 20

One Place, Many Languages 25

Freedom to Speak: A Virtual Way for Shy Students to Practice Speaking English

by Karen Bond, M.A.

I'm sure we all have students in our classes who simply won't speak (in English anyway), or finds it extremely embarrassing to open their mouths in front of their classmates. And you can just see the fear or a look of horror in their eyes when you ask them to give their opinion on the current topic in the class.

Some teachers may have a whole class of such students. Often it is for cultural reasons that they do not speak out. In some cultures, especially in Asia, group harmony is important, as is not "losing face" and, for these reasons, the students may not want to be singled out. They are not used to speaking out in class, and are often not encouraged to do so. Although these students may fit the stereotype of the 'quiet, passive Asian student', perhaps due to the educational setting or cultural restraints, this is not necessarily the way they *would like* to behave in the classroom. They may want to be more active and independent in the classroom and to have the opportunity to speak.

One way you can get your students to practise speaking without fear of losing face is by getting them to chat online. Nowadays, there are several online schools that offer EFL students the opportunity to practise their speaking and listening skills with a real native-speaking teacher and other students from around the world.

How does a language learning chat room work?

An EFL chat room is a 24/7 online community where students (usually) pay to go to practise their speaking and listening skills with native-speaker teachers and other students world-wide. Classes may be levelled (beginner, intermediate and advanced) or there may be sessions for all levels. There is often prepared material that is presented on a virtual whiteboard by the teacher, or there may be free practice. Everyone uses a headset with a built-in microphone, and the teacher has control over who speaks and when. Students can simply wait their turn to speak, write a message to the teacher indicating that they want the microphone, or can press a button to "raise their hand". The students are free to come and go as they please, but are encouraged to go to the most appropriate level for them.

How can a teacher-hosted chat room be a better environment than the traditional classroom for shy speakers of English? The key word is "anonymity". In the chat room, the teacher does not know the students' real names, where they are located, or what they look like. More importantly, if students make mistakes and feel terrible about them, it's easy for them to hide that from the teacher and the other students because no one can see their faces. No one can see if they have turned beet red.

One of my lower-intermediate online students said *"Many people does* (sic) *not like even to try to speak English because they feel shy doing it. And the chat helps you in this way."*

In addition, as an online student, you have the power to decide how much your classmates know about your true identity. You can change your name, gender, age, or social status, along with appearance, occupation and even personality. Anonymity makes you equal everyone else, with your contributions the only thing others judge you upon.

By constructing a new identity, shy students can not only maintain their privacy, but also have the opportunity to take risks, let go of their inhibitions and behave differently from normal -- for example -- more informally or openly. The online chat room can be a more equal environment than the traditional classroom because not just one student will dominate. The shy student need not feel the need to compete and is free from peer pressure.

The chat room goes further than role-play -- a traditional technique for encouraging students to lose their inhibitions in the classroom, which is usually dominated by the more fluent students. Unlike role-playing, students in the chat room can participate whenever and however much they want.

It should also be mentioned that many students are learning English to pass exams, to go to college or to get a promotion. The loosely-structured online conversation classes are not test-oriented and so give the students a place to practise their speaking skills without feeling the pressure to be correct all the time.

A student of mine told me *"Now that I have spoken so much English with ESL teachers* (in the chat room) *who don't give me a grade, I have confidence and believe I can do anything."*

The chat room is not without its flaws though, and it should be noted that `flaming` (unnecessary harsh criticism) by the teacher or other students, which would not happen in a face-to-face setting, could make students more anxious or unmotivated. Also, the chat room has a distinct culture, and students can become a part of this unique community, with a strong feeling of belonging and ownership. However, some students may find it difficult to communicate with total strangers or to build a relationship with them.

In my experience as an online teacher, the advantages of anonymity in a language learning chat room far outweigh these disadvantages; this environment is more likely to offer learners protection from humiliation than in a traditional classroom setting and can make them less inhibited and more open, which can only enhance the learning process.

Karen Bond is a British ESL teacher who lives in Montreal and teaches online. She has also taught English in a more conventional setting in Brazil, Hungary and Vancouver.

Ideas for Teaching Adult Learners

by Judy Pollard Smith

1. The Virtual Birthday Party

Even adult students like to have their birthdays recognized, but it is too costly to collect money for gifts and cakes. My class has resolved this issue by having a Virtual Birthday Party (without a computer). It is good for vocabulary enrichment and reviewing grammar. I draw the cake as they tell me what it should look like. I put the following information on the board for them to discuss:

"Today is Nima's birthday. We want to bake her a cake.
1. What flavour should it be? (banana? chocolate? walnut? vanilla? strawberry?)
2. What ingredients would you put in it? (Review words of measurement and quantity)
3. How many layers should it have?
4. What kind of icing should it have?
5. How large should it be? (how many slices? how much icing? how many layers, etc, all good for reviewing count and non-count nouns.)
6. With what should we decorate it?
7. What should we drink with the cake? What is your favourite hot drink? cold drink?

Then I ask them to give her a 'virtual gift'; "What do you think that Nima needs, or might like to have?" (We review the difference between 'needs' and 'wants' at this point.) They often come up with things like "an airplane ticket to Iran" or "my friendship". It provides a nice touch to the exercise as they are loving and thoughtful with their gifts.

This exercise can take 30 minutes depending on class size and language ability. It warms hearts and cements classroom friendships!

Another idea I have picked up recently thanks to training provided by Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board:

A problem with adult students who have never been formally schooled is that they interrupt and talk over one another to get the teacher's attention as do younger students. To remedy this, we pass a feather to the speaker – common among First Nations' people. Packages of colourful feathers can be picked up at a dollar store. It took a while for my students to take it seriously, but now I don't have to remind them to be quiet while others speak. In fact, they actually look forward to the practice and will often say things like, "let's use the green feather today."

2. The Student-generated Classroom Reader

I had been looking for a few years now for a reader that would really appeal to my students, a book that would address real problems in their actual lives. I didn't want to use anything too formal and yet needed something that would address the phonics we had been doing plus add vocabulary enrichment. I decided to write one myself and then it

dawned on me that since I have never been in their position it should be the students who write their own material. It followed that if they wrote it, they would understand it and relate to, and best of all, be able to read it. So, we went about writing our own class storybook.

Besides having intrinsic value as a teaching tool, it provided a great deal of follow-up activities as it morphed into other ideas. I can truly say that three students learned to read by reading their own stories aloud.

We began each story with a starter sentence, which I generated on the board. At first I let them come up with the sentences but the higher level students' ideas were difficult for the lower group and emphasized the difference in ability too much -- and the last thing a class needs is a loss of confidence. The students then took turns telling me what to write on the board in large, readable print. I surreptitiously corrected the grammar errors as I wrote.

When we studied consonant blends ("gr" "br" etc.), I opened with a sentence about a boy who likes green grapes. They took it from there and ended up in Italy in a vineyard in the town where one of the students came from. Another time, we had talked about 'spoiled' food so they wrote a story about a dog that got sick after eating spoiled cheese. They named the dog after a student's dog. This student had had to leave his dog behind in Jordan when he came to Canada. His telling us about his dog marked the first time the student had spoken in class. The next day he showed up with a photo of his dog and told the group more about his pet.

I took the story home each night, put it on my computer, added relevant questions for discussion and gave them each a copy the following day. We read it aloud in turns and discussed it. At the end of the year we had a story book of 14 stories that were written by the students.

Using Poetry to Teach Parts of Speech

There are many poems that would be suitable for this exercise, but I found one that works for me as it is simple, explanatory and full of concrete nouns. It has words that readily describe the five senses. The poem is "This Is Just To Say", by William Carlos Williams. You can find in on the internet. It talks about somebody who takes a cold plum out of the "ice-box," and then wonders if the person who left it there will miss it. The poem uses such adjectives as 'sweet,' 'cold,' 'delicious,' as well as pronouns.

My class used it to talk about who the narrator might be, about apologizing, about adjectives, about the five senses and about our favourite fruits. Then we wrote on graph paper acrostic poetry using our own favourite fruits. For example, the students would write the word apple vertically then begin lines of poetry with words that start with 'a,' 'p,' and so on.

The following day some students brought poetry that they read aloud in their first languages. I told them to put the appropriate emotion into the reading and the rest of us guessed what the poem was about, using a list on the board of emotions and types of poetry: romantic, nature, God, etc. We all enjoyed this exercise.

Judy Pollard Smith is a member of the Hamilton-Wentworth TESL Affiliate.

Considerations for the Revisions of the ESL/ELD Curriculum Document Grades 9-12

by Ivan Kocmarek

We who are on the frontline of delivering ESL/ELD programming in our secondary schools were very pleased to receive a formal policy document from the ministry in 1999[1] (elementary has, still, only a "resource" document[2] with which to work). This document, ESL/ELD Curriculum Grades 9-12, was recognition that we were a true and necessary discipline of equal integrity, accountability and value as any other existing subject. The first recognition we had received from the Ministry was back in 1988[3] but this was little more than a resource outline of the basic principles in teaching ESL and what, at that time, was called ESD (English Skills Development).
The difficulty, however, is that even though we have earned formal recognition as a secondary discipline among the other secondary subject areas, we are different from regular secondary subjects in many important ways:

a) Our five ESL levels and four ELD levels are levels of English proficiency and are not grade levels.
b) We are bound to the principle of continuous reception and intake of our clientele. We must receive, process, and integrate students into our programs/classes at any point in the school year.
c) We serve students who are many rungs below appropriate grade level (some are completely illiterate even in their first languages) and we attempt to bring them up, as much as possible, to approaching age-appropriate grade-level English before they exit our program.
d) All our students undergo the trauma of cultural and geographic relocation; consequently, many are at risk.
e) Most importantly, our programming is shaped by the clients who arrive in various waves depending on global events. The same qualitative characteristics (levels of literacy, attitudes to education, levels of trauma experienced prior to arrival in Canada, etc.) are found across the province so that pockets of various ethno-cultural groups are located around urban areas. Even more important is the high client numbers that allow us to offer diverse and rich ESL/ELD programming and increased extra-programming support (more sheltered subject area courses, more guidance and resource support and more administrative awareness and involvement). A school with 300 ESL/ELD students can offer programming that's different from a school with just three or even 30.

---

[1] Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9–12: English As a Second Language and English Literacy Development, 1999*
[2] Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8: English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development – A Resource Guide, 2001*
[3] Ministry of Education, Ontario, English as a Second Language and English Skills Development – Curriculum Guideline Intermediate and Senior Divisions, 1988

The secondary ESL/ELD curriculum is currently undergoing revision. Focus groups met across the province in October and November of last year, stakeholder meetings are scheduled in the very near future and writing teams are working on changes to the secondary ESL/ELD curriculum document this summer. The Ministry's biggest challenge, given the demographic variances of ESL/ELD students from program to program, will be to produce a document that works for the whole province. The revised curriculum must respond to the following issues.

1. Demography

The ESL/ELD curriculum does not exist in a vacuum. It functions best when nested in and delivered through a program. The type of ESL/ELD program delivery is driven by the demographics of its clientele. The standardization of the curriculum in our field in 1999 was a tremendously positive step forward, but the curriculum has to be presented (adapted... even modified) to serve a specific clientele. The number of students in ESL/ELD programs varies greatly across the province. A program that has 20 Mennonite Mexicans (who may be illiterate and averse to schooling) would present the curriculum differently than would a program populated mainly by Asian "Visa" (Study Permit) students (literate and academically aggressive), and both would differ from a program situated in a low-income-level inner-city school containing 400 plus students from more than 70 countries. Unlike other subject areas, ESL/ELD does not ask its students to fit into existing curriculum but tries to deliver what the existing clientele demands and needs in order to maximize student success. This is further compounded by the fact that ESL/ELD demographies can change in a continuous intake school during a school year and even during a semester (for example, at Sir John A. Macdonald S. S. in Hamilton, there was an influx of nearly 40 Somali ELD students this semester and they have become the dominant first-language group in the school. Many of these students struggle to achieve existing ELDAO curriculum expectations).

A related problem, which needs to be officially recognized in the curriculum, is that opportunities for ESL/ELD student success are tied to the number of students in the school. In this way, the need for split classes is minimized and it is possible to offer an array of congregated (sheltered) classes. These demographic concerns must be recognized in the introduction to the curriculum.

2. Congregated Classes

ESL congregated classes are those secondary subject area classes (Math, Science, Art, Phys. Ed., etc.) in which ESL/ELD students are brought together to acquire high school credits while they are learning English. The instructors for these classes adapt the regular subject area expectations, concentrate more on vocabulary acquisition, and tailor time-lines and assignments to build the confidence of ESL/ESD students. General, but adequate guidelines for teachers of congregated subject area classes (who often do not have ESL/ELD qualifications) need to be included perhaps in a separate section of the ESL/ELD curriculum.

3. Integration of School Personnel

The ESL/ELD curriculum as presented in the current document is most effective when the major players in a school are 'on board.' The school Administration should be informed ESL/ELD concerns so that they can facilitate ESL/ELD student success. ESL/ELD students are all 'at-risk' students and need to be given every school support possible. School Support Services (Guidance and Co-op Teachers) must be familiar with ESL/ELD concerns in order to facilitate time-tabling. Ideally, the lead ESL/ELD teacher should have time to oversee/assist in ESL/ELD student time-tabling. Teachers who deliver subject-area ESL/ELD courses must be informed of ESL/ELD student programming concerns. Finally, regular English instructors who receive ESL/ELD students who have completed the ESL/ELD program need to be aware of what takes place in our exit ESL/ELD courses and what these students bring to them (this seems to be a very neglected area in the curriculum document -- little is said regarding the academic careers of ESL/ELD students upon completing ESL/ELD exit courses). When these school components (Administration, Support Services, the ESL/ELD teacher, regular English teacher, Congregated Class teacher…) work in concert, ESL/ELD students' opportunities for success are maximized. These things need to be made explicit in the curriculum document.

4. ESL/ELD Student Transition Points

The existing ESL/ELD Secondary Curriculum must be more specific and helpful to those students who are in the exit ESL/ELD classes on their way to work or bridging to English. As a result, (in the short time they have in their ESL/ELD programs —4-5 semesters) most are not ready to deal with the senior (college and university) regular English curriculum. A true transition class -- a modified regular English curriculum taught by an ESL/ELD teacher -- is needed. One could also perhaps call into question the whole enterprise of teaching English literature to those older ESL/ELD students who are seeking the best way to prepare themselves for post-secondary opportunities in the non-humanities (science, engineering, computers, business…). Post-secondary preparation for these students would optimally consist of courses in technical and academic English.

The other transition point that seems to have been unduly neglected in the ESL/ELD secondary curriculum is the transition for those students who have had ESL/ELD elementary programming up to grade 8 and are now entering grade 9. Currently no methods exist for matching the four elementary stages of proficiency with respective course codes as they exist in the secondary ESL/ELD curriculum. To arbitrarily place students in programs may, indeed, result in a quick-fix inaccurate placement of grade 8 ESL/ELD students in their receiving secondary schools, but, without adjustment or correction, they may get off on the wrong foot at a crucial part of their academic careers. They may unnecessarily lose time and credits in working towards a secondary diploma and further post-secondary education.

ESL/ELD teachers and support-service personnel in each panel are seldom aware of the programming and ongoing concerns in the other panel. At the elementary level, the purpose of the ESL/ELD-stage continuum is meant to assist the teacher in adapting and modifying grade appropriate expectations. At the secondary level, the discreet ESL/ELD

courses are meant to provide a student with an entry point into an academic secondary career that competitively focuses on meeting diploma requirements. The courses are not equivalent to grade levels but represent a self-contained program in English instruction that is intended, upon exit, to equip the ESL/ELD student with a level of English that will allow him or her to enter into regular grade-level English courses and meet diploma requirements (grade 12 English, six grade 12 courses and passing the grade 10 Literacy Test).

ESL/ELD students undergoing the transition from grade 8 to grade 9 are moving from a culture in which they are advanced along age-appropriately (marks and time are not of primary concern) to a culture in which marks, credits earned and time spent to become successful are of paramount importance (both parents and students want to expedite graduation and entrance into college or university). Initial placement of grade 8 students in their high school ESL programs is, therefore, crucial – even more so in those high schools where a small ESL clientele may limit the options the grade 8 student may have or may limit the flexibility that guidance counselors and ESL teachers may have in monitoring and adjusting an initially misplaced former grade 8 ESL student.

We find that most of these grade 8 students need at least a semester of ESL/ELD programming before they can adjust to the regular secondary school curriculum. They need to be assessed by the secondary school ESL/ELD programs that they feed into in order to maximize their secondary school success. They also need to be monitored closely in their first semester in secondary school. All this needs to be stated explicitly in the curriculum documents.

The revision of the existing ESL/ELD secondary curriculum document needs to sort out these issues, and, where necessary, address them in the new document. I also hope that the discussion of these issues will generate needed dialogue among ESL/ELD teachers and consultants.

Ivan Kocmarek is ESL Department Head at Sir John A. Macdonald Secondary School in Hamilton, Ontario

Dr. David Mendelsohn awarded TESL Canada Honourary Life Membership

TESL Ontario recently awarded Dr. David Mendelsohn a TESL Canada Honourary Life Membership.

Dr. Mendelsohn's commitment to the profession spans more than four decades starting in 1964. After completing a Postgraduate Diploma in ESOL from Israel's Hebrew University in 1966, he went on to receive an M. A. in Applied Linguistics from the University of Wales in 1970. Following that, he received his Ph.D in Linguistics from the University of Edinburgh in 1977. Currently, he is Professor of Applied Linguistics and ESL and Director of the Graduate Programme in Theoretical and Applied Linguistics at York University in Toronto.

Upon receiving the award at Ottawa's TESL Canada conference last May, Dr. Mendelsohn noted, "The first 41 years have been wonderful, and I hope in 20 years from now that I can get another such award!"

'Dr. David' has been a long-time friend and supporter of our profession. Twice he has presented plenary addresses at TESOL International Conferences and once at TESL Canada. And he has frequently presented at TESL Ontario and a number of its affiliates, as well as at TEAL and TESL Nova Scotia. He has held editorial positions as Contributing Editor and co-editor of the TESL Canada Journal and is a member of the review board with the Asian Journal of ELT.

Dr. Mendelsohn's support of TESL Ontario goes beyond presenting at our conferences. He was Recording Secretary as well as an Executive Member in the early 80's and has recently held an advisory role with the Professional Standards Advisory Committee, part of TESL Ontario's Certification program.

The professor has served as a consultant to the Canadian Language Benchmarks Textbook Development Project, Pearson Publishers, as well as to the project that produced Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: A Guide to Implementation.

In addition to having been involved in numerous TESOL committees from 1997 to the present, Dr. Mendelsohn has also had time to publish three tests and seven books (authoring 5) and write seven book chapters and 23 articles in refereed journals.

Upon receiving the award at Ottawa's TESL Canada conference last May, he noted, "The first 41 years have been wonderful, and I hope in 20 years from now that I can get another such award!"

TESL Ontario president, Barb Krukowski presents Dr. David Mendelsohn with the award.

Understanding the English Language Challenges Immigrant Teachers Face through Their Academic Writing

by Li Zhang and Liying Cheng

Canada is a country of immigrants. In the past decade, more than 2,200,000 immigrants have immigrated to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002) with half of these immigrants landing in Ontario. Among these immigrants, many are teachers. In 1996, 1,722 teaching related professionals came to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Statistics, 1996). In addition, the 1996 Census shows that about 8.5% of the female immigrants and 6% of the male immigrants chose to work in the area of educational services (Wang, 2002).

In order to continue their profession in Canada, immigrant teachers need to adapt to a new cultural, social and teaching and learning context, and they often experience many challenges and difficulties (Bascia, 1996; Mawhinney, & Xu, 1997; Myles, Cheng, & Wang, in press; Phillion, 2003; Wang, 2002). Among the difficulties, English has always been viewed as a major barrier (Bascia, 1996; Mawhinney, & Xu, 1997; Myles, Cheng, & Wang, in press; Phillion, 2003). And adequate or a high level of English proficiency is of primary importance in securing employment and maintaining employment (Myles, Cheng, & Wang, in press; Phillion, 2003). Particularly, the need for a high level of English proficiency is paramount for immigrant teachers intending to practise as licensed teachers in Ontario.

Margaret Wilson, Registrar at the Ontario College of Teachers, says, "language skills are a key component of being a good teacher, and that is all the more true since the new Ontario curriculum requires students to pass literacy and numeracy tests" (http://www.oct.on.ca/english/ps/june_2000/language.htm).

This study will highlight the English language challenges immigrant teachers face in Ontario, Canada. Specifically, it will discuss the language difficulties immigrant teachers have in an analysis of 27 writing samples collected during the Alternative Teacher Accreditation Program for Teachers with International Experience (ATAPTIE) program. ATAPTIE is a Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.) for elementary educators funded by the Ontario government and hosted at Queen's University's Faculty of Education in partnership with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) and Local Agencies Serving Immigrants (LASI) World Skills Ottawa. The one-year B. Ed. provides immigrant teachers who were educated and qualified teachers in their own countries with the skills and knowledge needed to re-certify and find jobs in Ontario elementary schools. The ATAPTIE teacher candidates in this study come from 18 different countries including Belarus, China, India, Iran, Ireland, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Russia, Sri Lanka, Slovakia, Spain, Sudan, Syria, Tunis, Turkmenistan and Ukraine.

Research on Language Challenges

To examine the obstacles that immigrant teachers experience in their acculturation processes into a new teaching and learning context of their immigrant country, Phillion (2003) explored the experiences of five foreign-accredited teachers as they went through the process of becoming certified teachers in Ontario. The author revealed that the lack of

oral fluency in English and their accents posed major challenges for these foreign-trained teachers in obtaining employment and in job interview situations. Myles, Cheng and Wang (in press) conducted another study concerning immigrant foreign-trained teacher candidates in Canada. Their study demonstrated that for new immigrant teachers who needed to find jobs in Ontario elementary schools, a non-native English accent was one of their primary concerns. Many candidates purported that their English proficiency posed a challenge in their instruction and communication with fellow teachers (see also Cheng, Myles & Wang, 2004). And their non-native English accent might have been a disadvantage to them when applying for elementary teaching jobs in Ontario schools. The same concern was also addressed in Mawhinney and Xu's (1997) research.

Some similar depictions can also be extracted from Bascia's (1996) research on minority immigrant teachers in Canadian schools. One of the participants in this study, a grade three teacher of a Canadian school emigrating from Taiwan, described her own experience learning English as "...flying a kite on a windy day, it's so high up and you are so small, you can't catch it, and yet you have to hold on to the string, otherwise you'll lose it. ...That's a new language" (p.156).

Flores' (2001) study of immigrant teachers in Texas emphasized the language challenges confronted by foreign-trained teachers applying as paraprofessionals or as teachers in the United States. To meet a need for well-prepared teachers to work with linguistically and culturally diverse school populations across the United States, Project Alianza -- a teacher preparation initiative -- was implemented to certify foreign-trained "normalistas" (Flores, 2001, p. 2), i.e. teachers educated and certified in Mexico. The normalistas were required to pass the Texas Assessment of Skills Program (TASP) exam, which tests candidates' reading, writing and speaking skills before becoming employed as teachers or paraprofessionals. Nevertheless, of the 20 participants, initially only three passed all three portions of the TASP. After five or six attempts, more than half (60 per cent) of the 20 participants continued to have difficulty in passing the writing portion of the TASP. For the project committee, these normalistas' English language proficiency, especially their English writing, was of greatest concern. In the United Kingdom, Sutherland and Rees (1995) also reported challenges faced by internationally-trained teachers from Western Europe and other countries preparing to teach in the U. K.

In sum, the above studies have shown the language challenges immigrant teachers experience in these English-speaking countries. A lack of effective communication skills, lack of oral fluency, oral discussion and argument, difficulties in interviewing, speaking with a "non-Canadian" accent as well as passing certification-related testing were viewed in the studies as main language challenges confronted by these immigrant teachers. However, in most of these studies, the researchers discussed language challenges together with the following other difficulties immigrant teachers face; being viewed as different, different conceptions of teachers' learning and teaching practices, financial troubles and difficulties getting their qualifications accredited in their new country. Discussions about language difficulties faced by the teachers in these studies seem segmental based on these teachers' opinions and insufficient. Although the challenges are seen by these researchers and by us as interrelated and sometimes contingent upon each other, we have chosen, through this study[4], to explores specifically the English language challenges, i.e.

[4] This study is one portion of a larger study 'Evaluating the Challenges Foreign-Trained Teacher Candidates Face in ATAPTIE - funded by the Ontario Ministry Of Training, Colleges and Universities'.

the linguistic challenges these immigrant teachers face in their academic English writing during the ATAPTIE program.

Methodology

The data in this study includes 27 samples the program coordinator collected from the ATAPTIE teacher candidates[5] on the first day of their B. Ed. The purpose of this writing task was to obtain initial information on the candidates' English writing ability. The instructions for their writing were as follows: "Would you write something about your past professional teaching experiences? It will give me some ideas of your confidence as a writer of English. And the time will be 30-45 minutes."

Instrument

In order to analyze these writing samples efficiently, we have chosen Hamp-Lyons and Henning's (1991) Experimental Communicative Profile Scale (ECPS) as the assessing instrument. The rationale behind this choice is multifaceted. Firstly, multiple-trait scoring, such as ECPS, has been highly valued by researchers in the field of L2 writing assessment (Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Hirose & Sasaki, 1999; Kroll, 1998). Secondly, it is one of the main existing procedures for directly assessing writing ability. As one kind of analytic scales, multiple-trait scoring has been successfully used in other language programs (Kroll, 1998). Thirdly, ECPS has been proved its validity and reliability in assessing the writing performance of adult non-native English speakers (Hamp-Lyons, & Henning, 1991). Lastly, ECPS can be used to score ESL writing produced in timed, impromptu, direct assessment of writing. Obviously, the context of the present study is similar to that of the Experimental Communicative Profile Scale (ECPS) used in Hamp-Lyons and Hennings' (1991) study.

The ECPS consists of seven subscales, i.e. *communicative quality*, *interestingness*, *referencing*, *organization*, *argumentation*, *linguistic accuracy* and *linguistic appropriacy*. Considering that the writing samples analyzed in this study are descriptive essays, while the essays used in Hamp-Lyons and Henning's (1991) study were argumentative, six out of the seven subscales were retained for this study. The argumentation category was excluded. Each scoring scale in ECPS ranges from 1 (low) to 9 (high) with detailed proficiency descriptors. Hamp-Lyons and Henning (1991) explained that Range 1 would be a written piece that is wholly or almost wholly copied from the input text or task. Therefore only Ranges 2-9 were used in this study as there was no input text (only a writing prompt was provided) in the context of this study. The final version of the ECPS adopted in this study is displayed in the Appendix, which consists of six subscales on a range from 2-9.

[5] The ATAPTIE program consists of three cohorts of teacher candidates in total (2002-2003; 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 academic years). In order to protect the abnormity of the ATAPTIE candidates, no cohort number is revealed in this report.

Data Analysis

We applied the adapted Experimental Communicative Profile Scale (ECPS) to the 27 writing samples. Three analysis procedures were used for the data analysis. Firstly, each writing sample was rated and scored respectively on the 6 subscales and on the range 2-9. Secondly, the percentage of the scores on each subscale for each range was added up to show how well the writing samples performed overall on a range from 2 to 9. Lastly, the mean and standard deviation of the scores for the six subscales were calculated using SPSS to see the distribution of the scores on each scale. Percentages of the writing scores is displayed in Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the 6 scales on the ranges from 2-9 is displayed in Table 2.

Results

Table 1 shows the percentage of writing scores of the 27 writing samples on each six subscale and 8 (2-9) ranges. Table 1 indicates that the highest range of these teacher candidates' writing on the subscale of *communicative quality* (CQ) is 7. Among the 27 writing samples, more than 40 per cent of the teacher candidates received 7 on this scale. For the *interestingness* (I) scale, the highest range is 8, and 70.3% of the candidates' writing fell into the range of 7 and 6. For the *referencing* (R) scale, the highest range is 9 (one candidate), 66.6 per cent of the candidates received ranges from 7-8 on this subscale. The writing performance for the *organization* and *linguistic accuracy* subscales showed a wider spread of ranges. For *organization* (O), although half of the candidates achieved a range of 8-6, about one third of the teacher candidates fell into the range of 5 and another 18.5 per cent in the range of 4. i.e. *The writing lacks a clear organizational structure and the message is difficult to follow* (see Appendix). For *linguistic accuracy* (LAC), only one candidate (3.7 per cent) received a range of 8, 40.7 per cent of the candidates received the range of 7-6 and 48.1 per cent of the candidate's writing fell into Range 5. This subscale showed the biggest spread of all in the subscale range from 8-3. For the scale of *linguistic appropriacy* (LAP), 40.7 per cent of the candidates' writing was in the range of 7.

Table 1

Percentage of Writing Scores for Each 6 Scales and 8 (2-9) Ranges (N=27)

Scale / Range	CQ	I	R	O	LAC	LAP
9	0	0	3.7%	0	0	0
8	0	18.5%	18.5%	18.5%	3.7%	14.8%
7	40.7%	25.9%	48.1%	18.5%	18.5%	40.7%
6	37%	44.4%	18.5%	14.8%	22.2%	18.5%
5	14.8%	11.1%	11.1%	29.6%	48.1%	25.9%
4	7.4%	0	0	18.5%	3.7%	0
3	0	0	0	0	3.7%	0
2	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note. CQ=Communicative Quality; I=Interestingness; R=Referencing; O=Organization; LAC=Linguistic Accuracy; LAP=Linguistic Appropriacy

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics for the 6 subscales. It can be shown that the mean of the *referencing* (R) scale is the highest - 6.82 - whereas the mean of the *linguistic accuracy* (LAC) is the lowest at 5.33. The mean of the *linguistic appropriacy* (LAP) scale is 2nd lowest (5.85), compared with the five other scales. This indicates that these teacher candidates struggled mostly with linguistic accuracy and linguistic appropriacy in their English academic writing although organization is another sub-scale that was also rated lower (5.89) compared with other sub-scales. In addition, these three scales comparably show a larger spread among the 27 samples of writing, which can be seen through the standard deviation of these scales.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for the Six Scales (N=27)

Scale	CQ	I	R	O	LAC	LAP
Mean	6.11	6.52	6.82	5.89	5.33	5.85
Standard Deviation	.934	.935	.989	1.423	1.301	1.134

Note. CQ=Communicative Quality; I=Interestingness; R=Referencing; O=Organization; LAC=Linguistic Accuracy; LAP=Linguistic Appropriacy

Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of these writing samples demonstrated the kinds of language challenges and difficulties ATAPTIE teacher candidates face in various aspects of their English academic writing. The results reveal that the candidates displayed their ability in communicating with readers (*communicative quality*), their creativity and novelty in content in their writings (*interestingness*), and the fact that they could also make use of illustrations and examples in their written works (*referencing*). However, they lacked linguistic accuracy and appropriacy. The overall organization as well as the cohesion and coherence of their writing were not sufficiently displayed in this piece of the academic writing. In particular, many of them failed to display their English language ability in vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence structure, on the scale as *linguistic accuracy*.

The results exhibit that the mean score on the referencing scale is the highest compared with the five other scales and that 90 per cent of the candidates made frequent use of examples to illustrate their ideas. A possible reason for such a result could be that these teacher candidates were all experienced teachers in their native country and had high literacy in their own language before they came to Canada -- what they lacked was fluent and accurate use of English. In fact, they may well be excellent writers in their first languages.

The ultimate value of the ATAPTIE program is determined by the success of these teacher candidates in obtaining their B. Ed., re-certification and acquiring a job in elementary education in Ontario. Thus, the candidates' English writing proficiency is a key element to each above aspect of their success. Candidates need to be able to complete

their academic course work, pass the Ontario Teacher Qualifying Test[6] and be able to teach children in all elementary subject areas. For example, they need to compose a sentence and write it on the board. Therefore, lower proficiency in grammar, spelling and punctuation of these candidates can be a major challenge for them to pursue their teaching profession in a Canadian elementary school.

The results of this study explored the specific kinds of language difficulties that a group of foreign-trained and foreign-certified immigrant teachers have in their academic English writing. This study is not only confirmed but it has also developed findings on language challenges faced by immigrant teachers that previous research studies have uncovered. Flores' (2001) illustrated that for immigrant teachers, writing was a big barrier for them to pass a required state-mandated teacher entry exam and further to be a paraprofessional or a teacher in the United States. However, the particular kinds of challenges these immigrant teachers faced in their writing was not specified. The results of this study feed directly back to the ATAPTIE program and pinpoint where English language support to these teachers should be offered.

A clearer and better understanding of the experiences of this group of foreign-trained teachers offers insights about the nature and interpretation of teacher learning for new immigrants. This is important for an immigrant country like Canada where more and more teachers and professionals wish to practise. The findings also provide valuable reference and guidance for future evaluation of similar professional bridging programs like the ATAPTIE program.

Li Zhang is a Master's candidate in Education, and Liying Cheng (PhD) (chengl@educ.queensu.ca) is an assistant professor in English as a second/foreign language education, both at the Faculty of Education, Queen's University. They have worked on the evaluation project for the Alternative Teacher Accreditation Program for Teachers with International Experience (ATAPTIE) for the past three years.

References

Bascia, N. (1996). Inside and outside: minority immigrant teachers in Canadian schools. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 9(2),* 151-165.

Cheng, L. Myles, J. & Wang, H. (2004). Understanding the Challenges New Immigrants Have in Their Teaching Practicum: Perceptions of Associate Teachers. In D. Zinga (Ed.) *Perspectives on Multiculturalism* (pp. 101-110). Hamilton, Ontario: Zing Media Inc.

Flores, B. B. (2001). Thinking out of the box: one university's experience with foreign-trained teachers. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives,* 9(18). Retrieved November 19, 2003, from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v9n18.html

Hamp-Lyons, L. & Henning, G. (1991). Communicative writing profiles: An investigation of the transferability of a multiple-trait scoring instrument across ESL writing assessment contexts. *Language Learning, 41*(3), 337-373.

Hamp-Lyons, L. (1995). Rating nonnative writing: the trouble with holistic scoring. *TESOL Quarterly, 29,* 759-762.

[6] The Ontario Teacher Qualifying Test (OTQT) is a requirement for a Certificate of Qualification and Registration from the Ontario College of Teachers. This test, however, was discontinued in 2005.

Hamp-Lyons, L. (2001). Fourth generation writing assessment. In T. Silva & P. K. Matsuda (Eds), *On second-language writing* (pp. 117-128). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Kroll, B. (1998). Assessing writing ability. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 18*, 219-240.

Mawhinney, H., & Xu, F. (1997). Reconstructing the professional identity of foreign-trained teachers in Ontario schools. *TESOL Quarterly, 31*(3), 632-639.

Myles, J., Cheng, L. & Wang, H. (in press). Teaching in Elementary School: Perceptions of Foreign-trained Teacher Candidates on their Teaching Practicum. *Teaching and Teacher Education*.

Phillion, J. (2003). Obstacles to accessing the teaching profession for immigrant women. *Multicultural Education, 11*(1), 41-45.

SasaKi, M & Hirose, K. (1999). Development of an analytic rating scale forJapanese L1 writing. *Language Testing, 16*(4), 457-478.

Sutherland, H & Rees, S. (1995). Wasted lives? Access to the profession for overseas trained teachers. *Adults Learning (England), 7*(1), 17-19.

Appendix

Adapted Experimental Communicative Profile Scale (ECPS)

Communicative Quality	Interestingness	Referencing	Organization	Linguistic Accuracy	Linguistic Appropriacy
[9] The writing displays an ability to communicate in a way that gives the reader full satisfaction.	The writing shows high creativity and novelty, fully engrossing the reader.	The writing shows abundant use of illustrations and examples displaying cultural awareness.	The writing displays completely logical organizational structure, enabling the message to be followed effortlessly.	The reader sees no errors of vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, or grammar.	There is an ability to manipulate the linguistic system with complete appropriacy.
[8] The writing displays an ability to communicate without causing the reader any difficulties.	The writing shows novelty and creativity, sustaining interest throughout.	The writing makes frequent use of examples suited to the reader.	The writing displays a logical organizational structure that enables the message to be followed easily.	The reader sees no significant errors of vocabulary, punctuation, or grammar.	There is an ability to manipulate the linguistic systems appropriately.
[7] The writing displays an ability to communicate with few difficulties for the reader.	The writing has frequent novel ideas that evoke reader interest and attention.	The writing offers many examples that are suitable for most readers.	The writing displays good organizational structure that enables the message to be followed throughout.	The reader is aware of but not troubled by occasional errors of vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, or grammar.	There is limited ability to manipulate the linguistic systems appropriately, but this intrudes only occasionally.
[6] The writing displays an ability to communicate although there is occasional strain on the reader.	The writing occasionally shows interesting ideas that attract reader attention.	The writing makes use of examples although the particular examples used may not be culturally appropriate.	The writing is organized well enough for the message to be followed throughout.	The reader is aware of errors of vocabulary, spelling, or grammar—but only occasionally.	There is limited ability to manipulate the linguistic systems appropriately, but this intrudes only occasionally.

[5] The writing displays an ability to communicate although there is often strain on the reader.	The writing occasionally provides new information but little of it is interesting.	The writing makes infrequent use of explanations or examples.	The writing is organized well enough for the message to be followed most of the time.	The reader is aware of errors of vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, or grammar that intrude frequently.	There is limited ability to manipulate the linguistic systems appropriately, which intrudes frequently.
[4] The writing shows a limited ability to communicate, which puts a strain on the reader throughout.	The writing is routine in the major part of its content with little new information.	The writing contains fragmented examples or allusions that assist few readers.	The writing lacks a clear organizational structure and the message is difficult to follow.	The reader finds the control of vocabulary, spelling, punctuation and grammar inadequate.	There is inability to manipulate the linguistic systems appropriately, causing severe strain for the reader.
[3] The writing does not display an ability to communicate although meaning comes through spasmodically.	The writing is dull and uninteresting for most readers.	The writing provides no examples suitable for the reader.	The writing has no discernable organizational structure, and a message cannot be followed.	The reader is aware primarily of gross inadequacies of vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, punctuation and grammar.	There is little or no sense of linguistic appropriacy, although there is evidence of sentence structure.
[2] The writing displays no ability to communicate.	The writing is completely void of interesting content.	The writing provides no examples whatever.	No organizational structure or message is recognizable.	The reader sees no evidence of control of vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, or grammar.	There is no sense of linguistic appropriacy.

Note. Adapted and modified from "Communicative Writing profiles: An Investigation of the Transferability of a Multiple-Trait Scoring Instrument Across ESL Writing Assessment Contexts," by L. Hamp-Lyons and G. Henning 1991, *Language Learning*, *41*(3), p. 370-373. The researchers of this study adopted six of the seven subscales, which excluded the argumentation category.

Review of the Linguistic Prior Learning Assessment for International Pharmacy Graduate Students at the U of T

by Michael Galli and Zubin Austin

Introduction

Developing a profession-specific language assessment requires ample resources to ensure that such tests provide fair and accurate results. This paper will review the history and development of the Linguistic Prior Learning Assessment for foreign-trained pharmacists enrolled in the International Pharmacy Graduate Program at the University of Toronto. Though the PLA was discontinued in 2003, valuable lessons learnt from it are guiding the present development of a similar language assessment for the same program. The limitations of the original PLA will be examined herein and its future direction discussed.

History

In 1999, the University of Toronto (U of T), Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy established the International Pharmacy Graduate (IPG) Program to provide pharmacists who were qualified outside of Canada with assistance in navigating the Canadian pharmacy licensure process. Educational modules were developed to teach pharmacy performance skills and deliver knowledge as well as pharmacy specific communication skills. Entry to the IPG Program requires demonstration of English proficiency via one of four commercial, large-scale, standardized language tests, as stated in the admissions policies of the Ontario College of Pharmacists (OCP)[7]. The use of these tests as gate-keeping admissions criteria was arrived at by default because no alternative tests were available to provide language proficiency assessments for pharmacists. However, because these tests were designed for purposes other than admissions screening for professional-skills programs, their use in this case raises concerns for validity of construct. Also in question are the ethical implications of gate keeping with such unsuitable assessment tools. The solution was to develop a language assessment that was fitting to this unique purpose.

In response to this need, a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) system was developed, albeit with limited success. The designation of "PLA" , rather than some variant of 'language assessment', was applied in recognition that all students come to the IPG Program with previous pharmacy practice experience and language skills and that these should be acknowledged. The PLA was composed of two separate tracks; one to assess pharmacy performance abilities and another to assess pharmacy-related language use. This paper focuses on the latter (the Linguistic PLA); the purpose, development and implementation of the language-related PLA will be described, and its lessons and limitations highlighted in the following sections.

---

[7] Please refer to the OCP website for details: http://www.ocpinfo.com/client/ocp/ocphome.nsf/web/e-factsheet!OpenDocument

Educational Purposes

The purpose of the Linguistic PLA was to identify students who were entering the IPG Program with low-level language skills. In previous iterations of the Program, a number of students faced language-related difficulties, which had not been identified in the standardized tests they had successfully passed. Further to this purpose, the PLA would provide early detection of students who required additional support (e.g. ESL or skill-specific classes). Resources internal or external to the IPG Program would then be recommended or provided to address each student's specific needs. To this end, *Individualized Learning Plans* were created. These plans reported the skill areas in which each test-taker had exhibited low proficiency and gave recommendations for further practice.

Development of the PLA

At the outset, two coordinators were contracted to conceptualize and operationalize the PLA: a pharmacist, Artemis Diamantouros, to oversee the pharmacy performance aspects of the PLA and an ESL consultant, Michael Galli, to oversee the language aspects. A policy statement, based on standards set by The Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) (Day 2000, Day and Zakos 2000), was drafted to establish the basic precepts of the PLA. This document outlined the principles, rationale, design and procedures of the PLA and was to be provided to those who would be tested. After this initial phase of drafting a broad overview and foundation of the PLA process, the greater challenge of determining language competency levels and language assessment criteria was addressed.

We were able to simplify the task of identifying competency levels because the stakes associated with the PLA were low. Since this was not initiated as an assessment for gate-keeping purposes, we did not attempt to determine cut scores, below which test-takers would be prohibited from entering, or above which test-takers could be exempted from taking the Program. Assessment criteria were derived from the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB-2000) levels eight to eleven. Competency descriptors and performance indicators were selected from these four CLB levels based on the PLA Coordinators' determination of appropriateness (related to authentic pharmacy tasks). These decisions were informed by the pharmacy PLA Coordinator's years of practice in the field as well as both coordinators' several years of experience working in the IPG. Language tasks and competencies, previously determined in developing the IPG educational modules[8] provided the basis for the PLA test tasks.

The selection criteria and levels were selected on several guiding principles. First were mainly tasks tasks that had authentic relevance to the pharmacy profession with the exception of one part of each of the speaking, listening and writing assessments. This was done to provide an opportunity to diagnose specific error types within these skill areas. Second, the CLBs were referenced for language competencies and performance indicators. In reviewing the authentic tasks and performance conditions that pharmacists

[8] Within the IPG program, a module entitled "Language of Patient Counselling" had, through a needs analysis, identified the profession-specific language competencies and tasks required of practicing pharmacists.

engage in, it became apparent that the associated CLB competency levels covered a varied range; that is, there were tasks common to CLB levels 8 - 11. As it was not the mandate of the PLA to determine a minimum level of language competence for practising pharmacists, these authentic, multi-level CLB competencies were used as criteria for developing test tasks. It was clear to us that developing an assessment model based on the authentic tasks of target language use (TLU) (Bachman and Palmer 1996), which matched one particular CLB level would entail a much closer scrutiny of the TLU and CLB descriptors. This was a task that we were not prepared to attempt without the assistance of a larger test development team.

Test Tasks

The writing assessment required both a memo or letter response and an essay response; the latter being the non-authentic task, since pharmacists have no need for such writing outside the IPG Program. The reading tasks required test-takers to read and respond to questions about an article in a pharmacy journal and also to a drug monograph. The listening task was based on two taped dialogues. Test takers noted details from these to answer test questions. This was not necessarily an authentic task. Although pharmacists are required to respond to such phone calls, they do not listen in as third parties as when listening to tape dialogues. This was introduced after the pilot PLA because a listening task was required for test-takers who did not make it to the stage-two speaking assessment, where listening was assessed based on CLB criteria. Speaking was conducted on two levels. First, a simple interview, not CLB rated, was conducted for diagnostic purposes; linguistic elements (e.g. pronunciation and grammar were observed). This was not authentic in that it did not simulate any real-life language use. Second, simulated patient interviews (role-plays) were conducted to determine the test-takers' speaking and listening skills in a more authentic type task.

Implementation of the PLA

The PLA was piloted in October 2002. This entailed a full day of testing, with numerous and costly human and material resources. For practical reasons, revisions were made that streamlined this process for the four succeeding iterations. The resulting format for testing the four language-skill areas, as described above, was more efficient and less expensive. However, whereas all test-takers in the pilot were required to do both speaking assessments, in the subsequent PLAs, only those individuals who demonstrated exemplary language competence and pharmacy knowledge and competence were permitted to undergo the second stage of oral assessment (the simulated patient interviews). These test-takers were required to return for a second day of testing, when a number of additional and costly resources were needed: i.e. standardized patients[9], pharmacist and language assessors, several track coordinators and/or invigilators. This speaking task was not given to all candidates because it had been observed in the pilot that many simply could not even begin the task. However, it is evident that omitting this task would have had a negative impact on the authenticity of the speaking component of the PLA.

[9] Professional actors who play standardized roles of patients for test and professional practice purposes.

Limitations of the PLA

There were several concerns around the validity and reliability of the PLA. Validation procedures were not factored into the budget, so no attempt was made to determine the validity of the constructs. Reliability between assessors and between test versions was likewise left out of the process. This lack of accountability can be attributed to the high costs of developing and running such a language assessment. To achieve any semblance of validity would require that on-going validation be conducted to verify that test constructs were appropriate and reliable, and also to ensure that assessors were trained and standardized. Such an operation requires ample funding. Due to the low enrollment in the IPG program, test-takers' fees alone did not cover the costs. Consequently, it was decided that maintaining the PLA was not feasible.

Another concern related to the timing of the PLA. If it were to be used to provide incoming students with an indication of their strengths and weaknesses, then it would be necessary to conduct it well in advance of each semester. This was a recurring dilemma because students would often wait until several days before the deadline to register. Some would even apply after the deadline, and because the program required higher admissions for sustainability, these late-registering individuals were accepted. This served to undermine the purpose of the PLA and was likely one of the greatest factors leading to its being abandoned.

Looking Forward

The Linguistic PLA created for international pharmacy graduates was a first attempt at producing a language assessment for profession-specific needs. Validity and reliability concerns, indirectly influenced by low student enrollment in the IPG Program as well as limited funding, made the assessment process unsustainable, and therefore, the PLA had to be discontinued. It would, however, be an oversimplification to state that the PLA was a failure. Much was learnt from the development and implementation processes, which is now informing the development of a new language assessment for pharmacists.

Shortly after the original PLA was shelved, the IPG Program received a grant to develop a new language assessment instrument, currently in progress. While the project team is addressing a number of validity and reliability concerns, issues of feasibility and sustainability are also being discussed. One question remains: which institution will take possession and responsibility for this language assessment? Whether it is the Ontario College of Pharmacists (OCP) or the Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy, the PLA will require constant maintenance and development to address validity issues. The OCP has more to gain from this because the new PLA is being developed with the purpose of benchmarking pharmacy language creating cut-scores that could define minimum language competency for practising pharmacists. Such an assessment process would be a more valid tool for the gate-keeping purposes for which the OCP presently uses large-scale standardized tests. If the PLA is validated and shown to be reliable, it could replace the TOEFL and other such tests, which are so poorly suited to the task of determining which pharmacists have adequate language competence. Again, the fiscal difficulties that plagued the PLA could easily continue to besiege this new test due to the on-going struggle to

adequately fund the validation process. Unless a suitable solution is found, all such profession-specific language assessments could be negatively affected.

Michael Galli, B.Ed worked as the Language Co-ordinator for the International Pharmacy Graduate Program at the Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Toronto. Zubin Austin BScPhm, MBA, MIS, PhD is the Ontario College of Pharmacists Professor of Pharmacy Practice at the Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy, U. of T.

References

Bachman, Lyle F. and Palmer, A. S. (1996). *Language Testing in Practice*. Oxford: OUP.
Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2000. Centre For Canadian Language Benchmarks. www.language.ca
Day, M. (2000). *Developing benchmarks for prior learning assessment and recognition – practitioner perspectives.* Belleville: The Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA).
Day, M. and Zakos, P. (2000). *Developing benchmarks for prior learning assessment and recognition – practitioner perspectives: Guidelines for the Canadian PLAR Practitioner.* Belleville: The Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA).

One Place, Many Languages

By Claudia Ancuta

Background

A few steps from Greenwood subway station on the Danforth-Bloor line in Toronto is a unique school. In September 1965, the Toronto Board of Education began its first program for immigrant students 12-19. Its mission was to provide reception, assessment, placement services and ESL instruction for adolescent immigrants in the old Kimberley Street School (near Main and Gerrard Street). In May of 1974, after the Fire Marshall condemned the Main Street building, the Toronto Board of Education moved the program to its present location on Mountjoy Avenue. Since then, Greenwood Secondary School has gone through many changes to become a semestered ESL school that provides high schools credit each semester and, through Continuing Education, non-credit subjects to nearly 300 students. Its mandate is to offer a concentrated 10-month program over two semesters of integrated language instruction in core subjects. The students are new immigrants either at the beginning or intermediate levels of English.

Mission

The mission of Greenwood Secondary School is to assure a smooth transition to a mainstream high school after a student acquires foundation skills in numeracy and literacy; as well, the school tries to provide equity of access to all students. A sheltered instruction approach for ESL delivery is utilized, meaning that students are grouped into classes by their level of English language proficiency. The school offers ESL A & B (1 and 2) levels.

Programs

The teachers have ESL qualifications in addition to being specialists in other subjects. They believe that students can learn happily and successfully from one another and from their past experiences if the teachers provide a workable format. This is the first Canadian school these students attend and the mandate of the teachers is to introduce them to the Canadian way of life and to a new environment with minimum frustration.

The main feature of all programs is intensive instruction in all aspects of English, with particular emphasis on reading and writing. The students are totally immersed in the language, no matter the subject they are taught and can acquire up to four credits per semester in ESL and core subjects – geography, music, visual arts, physical and health education, health and nutrition, computer studies, (BTT), Guidance and Learning Strategies, (GLS), Individual

and Society, (HIF), mathematics and science. The courses are adapted for language, not content, to better serve the students, and the teachers modify their strategies to present the curriculum. Delivery models have changed over the years -- different students with different background require tailored methods.

The teachers know that to be effective they need to use tools to assess their students' needs and language proficiency. They develop curriculum, plan lessons and choose many methods and many activities, such as writing, resources and reflective practices for continued growth on the job. Collaboration is the key – everybody shares strategies and knowledge on a regular basis. Principal Marilyn Mendelssohn clarifies, "I am very proud of the team building and collegiality of the whole staff who work together to help the students". The classes are interactive, based on student-centered learning as well as authentic materials and content.

The school offers English Language Development, a program that helps students who have little or no English and few literacy skills in their first language. Through games and total immersion, the teachers provide students with reading and writing skills needed for the next subjects.

The library is specialized, with more than 10,000 books geared towards ESL learners, providing an array of books, magazines and multimedia resources. Here, the teachers help students find books, write reports and use one of a dozen computers in a friendly and warm environment. The students also have access to the computer lab with 24 computers where they may practise typing or search the Internet.

Support services include a Guidance office where students receive help learning to research and plan for future education and careers. The Guidance Counselor is actively involved in students' personal and career growth. There are also settlement workers who speak different languages to help.

The students have opportunities to learn through a wide range of field trips: Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, Ontario Science Centre, Royal Ontario Museum and Queen's Park, for example.

Most students participate in such extracurricular activities as basketball or volleyball games. The administration provides active encouragement to all students to participate in the school's life.

The Student Council has an active presence in the school's and students' lives with charity runs, food drives and organized dances. For example, they initiated fund raising for the Tsunami victims.

Greenwood also has a Language Enrichment Academic Program for students under 16 with gaps in their educational background.

Students

There are 273 students currently enrolled in Greenwood Secondary School, all newcomers who speak a total of 31 languages. With continuous intake, some students arrived at school only a month ago. Students come from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds – Asia, Africa, Europe, South America or Caribbean. Many students are from countries affected by war or poverty. Their immigrant status ranges from refugee to landed immigrant.

In a multicultural setting, students benefit from devoted and experienced teachers, some who are able to speak more than one language. The school is far more than a transition to a regular streamed high school. It is their first school in Canada. For these newcomers, Greenwood School is like a family. Shidrokh Paymani, a student from Iran who came to Canada last year said, "Greenwood means great memories of my first months in Canada, my first school, my best teachers in my whole life. I will never forget Greenwood." The students acquire and practise basic listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in English. They may stay up to a maximum of three semesters; when ready, they are placed and integrated into a high school that meets their educational needs and goals.

Benefits

At Greenwood Secondary School, the warm atmosphere and an understanding staff help students make the adjustment to a new country and a new educational environment. The teachers promote respect for and understanding of self and others, as well as a love of learning. The program provides a safe and effective learning environment for the ESL student who is new to the country and who will be nurtured and will respond to a small school setting. When they move on, the students have a sense of belonging to Canada and to our educational system.

Claudia Ancuta teaches at Greenwood S.S. in Toronto.